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TAGS: KPAO OPRC KMDR PREL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; U/S NICHOLAS BURNS'S CRITICISM OF
ARGENTINA; ARGENTINE TIES TO VENEZUELAN HUGO CHAVEZ 03/26/07; BUENOS
AIRES

11. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend international stories focus on the implications of US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns' critical statements

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about Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's anti-US President Bush rally in Buenos Aires. Daily-of-record "La Nacion" carries an editorial highlighting that "nothing could be worse for Argentina than if the Chavez regime were to be considered its main and best ally."

12. OPINION PIECES

- "Even though the US-Argentine spat is downplayed, the (US-Argentine) relationship is no longer the same"

Ana Baron, Washington-based correspondent for leading "Clarín," penned (03/24) "US and Argentine diplomats downplayed the tension sparked by President Hugo Chavez's rally in Argentina and the exchange of statements it unleashed. Both sides said they will continue focusing on the issues in which the two countries agree. Nevertheless, some aspects of the bilateral relationship have been irrevocably damaged."

"According to an unidentified US source, the White House considers the Ferro rally one more piece of evidence of what Under Secretary Nicholas Burns termed Argentine 'inconsistency' in its ties to the US..."

"... The Argentine Foreign Ministry argues that Argentina does not pose a threat such as that of Iran or North Korea. However, the country does not have the same strategic weight for the White House. Also, the Ferro rally is Kirchner's third public rebuff against Bush. And this is not a minor issue. You must recall that the first one occurred at the Monterrey Summit... Then came the Summit of the Americas..."

"US U/S for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns said that his February trip was so positive that he thought that the disagreement over the summit had been left behind. This is why, according to him, the Ferro rally was unfortunate.

"Sources consulted by 'Clarín' said the Ferro rally put an end to any further attempt of 'presidential diplomacy.' If there was any possibility that Kirchner and Bush could meet again, this door has been totally closed."

- "The US reaffirms its posture of criticism"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," comments (03/24) "According to sources in the G.O.P. and outside of it, Nicholas Burns, number three at the US Department of State, expressed the prevailing feeling in the Bush administration about the Argentine Government, although he was wrong in the way he did so -- to the degree that he generated disagreement within the US Department of State.

"According to a Washington source, the US position, which was expressed by Burns, is firm. 'The US and Argentina are very close and major allies in issues... such as non proliferation or terrorism.'

"The prevailing view in the Bush administration is that Kirchner 'gets as close to Chavez as he can to get money out of him' due to domestic needs. 'Kirchner has no foreign policy. Everything he does is based on domestic interests.'

"... Behind the scenes, a high-ranking source at the Bush administration reaffirmed Burns and Shannon's stance: 'Argentina and Brazil's interests in South America are different from ours. However, both should acknowledge that Venezuela's purposes are dreadful and that, sooner or later, the Chavez administration will collapse and Argentina and Brazil will have to get more involved.'"

- "A shot that hit the wrong target"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (03/24) "Nicholas Burns was wrong. Being one of the 'nine stars' of US diplomacy, with a thorough knowledge of Europe and the Middle East, (Burns) demonstrated he does not understand Latin America's manners and reactions. He wanted to convey an explicit message to Argentina and he did so based on his own perceptions. He was in Buenos Aires when Nestor Kirchner lashed out at the US due to its interest in purchasing Transener (February 9). One month later, on March 9, Hugo Chavez led his BA rally. Those two events in one month perhaps were too much in the Anglo-Saxon's view.

"(Burns) mistreated the Argentine Ambassador in public in front of diplomats, academics and journalists..."

"He forced some reaction from Buenos Aires. As Tom Shannon knows well, Kirchner reacts to whatever appears on the front pages of newspapers..."

"He troubled the US-Argentine bilateral relationship..."

"He frustrated the debate that the US official silence had set off in Buenos Aires... Burns' statements made those who rejected Chavez's rally in Argentina appear to be pro-US. Not many in Buenos Aires would like such a connection.

"He facilitated Chavez's work... and Kirchner's re-election or his wife's ascension... Between 60-70 percent of Argentines reject President Bush and a US claim would contribute votes to the Government rather than depriving it from them.

"He strengthened the prevailing stereotypes about the US in Latin America. Washington is seen as an imperialist, clumsy and aggressive, elephant also in Argentina.

"He contributed one more argument to Kirchner's usual mistreatment..."

"He weakened his own team for Latin America. The question is how much power Shannon has. Who is the boss? Why negotiate with him when John Negroponte, the number two at the US Department, or Burns, implement different policies in the region?..."

- "Kirchner defies the US and Brazil at the same time"

Joaquin Morales Sola, political analyst of daily-of-record "La Nacion," opines (03/25) "Something Argentina had never been able to do was promoting simultaneous frictions with the US and Brazil. Kirchner managed to do it. Washington also had its own satisfaction

- just a few times before had a government publicly expressed a face-to-face complaint to another government through its ambassador. Nicholas Burns, Condoleezza Rice's most entrusted diplomat, did exactly this with Argentine Ambassador Jose Octavio Bordon. It must have been the most uncomfortable moment of Bordon's entire life.

"Did the Argentine Government ignore that Chavez's rally in Buenos Aires, at the same time Bush was visiting Uruguay, could bother the US? Certainly, it is impossible that the Argentine Government could ignore it... Kirchner allowed Chavez to stage his anti-Bush stunt in Buenos Aires despite the opposition of most of his Cabinet. Why did he do it? According to an official version, Kirchner understood Bush's Latin American tour was an attempt to divide Mercosur countries. Bush was in Uruguay when Chavez's provocation took place. Unfortunately, Argentina and Uruguay do not need Bush to be divided. They already are, and the reasons for this can only be found in South America.

"... According to important USG officials, consequences are easily predictable. No USG office will move one finger from now on to help Argentina in the renegotiation of its defaulting debt to the Paris Club...

"Kirchner's behavior only weakens the moderates in Washington, Tom Shannon among them. U/S Nicholas Burns was also expressing personal disappointment, because he had trusted in Kirchner.

"... The USG will not encourage its companies to invest in Argentina. This is another conclusion, although corporations can always make their own decisions."

- "Chavez, Argentina and the world"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" editorializes (03/25) "After Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's latest visit to Argentina, some have tried to downplay the implications of his rally for the country. The US claim, which was expressed by the number three at the US Department of State, Nicholas Burns, is against those impressions.

"Having used the city of Buenos Aires as a stage of confrontation between Venezuela's strong man and the US President has been, at least, crazy according to the most basic diplomatic standards. Argentine authorities should have noticed that it was advisable to distance themselves from the most controversial aspects of Chavez's visit to the country.

"Chavez has repeatedly infringed on the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other nations, which is

an explicit principle in the OAS Charter...

"Chavez is also an unusual strategic ally of Iran, which is accused of ties to the international terrorism... In the arms race on which Chavez is embarked, he is purchasing sophisticated weapons from this country, which implies a threat to regional peace and security.

"In this framework, Argentina continues without full access to international loan markets... In such a fragile situation, the national government has found in Chavez a creditor who is willing to purchase new Argentine public debts bonds and finance some of its projects. Nothing is for free in politics and less so in international politics..."

"... Argentina has to work hard to build relations with those nations that share its democratic tradition and culture. Nothing could be worse for Argentina that the Chavez regime be considered its main and best ally."

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